

Disappointed

August 15, 2010

Colossians 3:1-11

Luke 12: 13-21

The movie 'Inception' is a powerful movie about dreams within dreams within dreams. There are many different stories that thread their way through the movie. One such story is about the relationship between a man and his son. The man was a multi-billionaire: the kind of self-made man whose greed and self-interest and ruthlessness had destroyed every relationship in his life, including the one he had with his son. For the son was different from his father. He was kind, and gentle, and lacked his father's ruthless streak. But he loved his Dad and he wanted to make his Dad proud of him, and so he had tried to be like him. He had tried to be cutthroat in his business dealings, but it just wasn't in him. Called to his dying father's bedside, the young man was crushed by his father's final judgment. Leaning forward to catch his last words, the son heard his Dad say directly to him, "Disappointed"..... "Disappointed."

Disappointed is surely how the man in today's Gospel lesson felt when he approached Jesus at the beginning of today's Gospel lesson. "Teacher," he said, "tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me." In fact, my guess is that he was more than just disappointed by being left out of the family inheritance. There are few things more painful than a will that favors one child over another. I think of my friend Ann who, along with her brother and sister, had for many years faithfully taken care of their abusive, alcoholic mother. After her death, Ann discovered – to her horror- that her mother had left nothing to her brother and sister, and everything to her. Now, it wasn't a large estate, and when everything was settled Ann gave a third of the estate to her brother, and a third to her sister. But that, of course, was not the point. The point was that their mother had proclaimed publically that she loved only one of her children. The pain of her rejection left scars that all 3 of her kids still bear today.

"Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me." Jesus responded to the man's request the way He usually responded when asked to arbitrate. He refused to get personally involved, suggesting that the man seek out a judge, whose job it was to solve disputes. And then he turned the man's request into a teaching opportunity. He began by stating a profound truth: "One's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions," He said. And then He told a story. "There once was a man," He said, "who was very rich. He owned lots of property and many fields. He worked those fields and was able to harvest such an abundance of grain that he didn't know what to do with it all. He only knew that he had it made- he was set for life: he could eat, drink and be merry. Freedom 55 was his! Wisely, he set about to protect his windfall by building bigger barns to hold his grain. I say 'wisely', because surely this man is an excellent model for us all. Being a good steward of our own resources is part of what being a person of faith is all about. We are called to work hard and, if possible, to save: to buy RRSP's so that we are able to take care of ourselves and our families throughout our lives. Indiscriminate

spending; wracking up huge debt on our VISA card, is surely irresponsible. Which is one of the reasons why God's response to the rich man seems, well, unfair. "You fool," he said, "you fool. You have spent your life amassing great wealth. You have placed your sense of security in money. And the truth is that money has no power over many things, including the power of death. Tonight you will die. And what use will your money be to you then?"

Harsh words...but then Jesus often used harsh words when trying to convey an important truth. "One's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions," He said, and by this He did not mean that we shouldn't be good stewards of what we have, only that good stewardship means more than just looking after our own needs. We are also called to use our money to be "rich towards God": to be generous to God's people; to help others to help themselves.

Recently I read about "The Giving Pledge", which is a challenge that has been issued by Warren Buffet, who is the 3rd richest man in the world. Mr. Buffet has pledged to give away 99% of his own money before he dies, and he has challenged other billionaires to pledge to give at least half their wealth away before they die. Over 40 billionaires have accepted the challenge, including Bill Gates, George Lucas, Ted Turner, Michael Bloomberg, and Barron Hilton . Now, it would be easy to say "Well...that's all well and good...but if you give away half a billion dollars it still leaves you with \$500 million"...but I think to respond like this, is to miss the point. And the point is, that the value of life is not found in what we have, but in what we are able to share with others. It's true for billionaires. It's true for millionaires. And it's true for the rest of us.

Now I know that some of us struggle to make our monthly financial commitments. I know that some of us are on fixed incomes. Few of us have the luxury of being able to give away half of all we own. But then how much we give is really not the point. Giving, is the point. Being intentional about our giving, is the point. Being willing to put a certain amount of money aside every month: \$20, \$50, \$100, \$500- so that we can be "rich towards the people that God loves," is the point. We do it because it is part of our call as Christians. And we do it because, in doing it, we will experience "abundance of life"- of life that really matters- of meaning and purpose that is part of God's great longing for each of us.

"Disappointed" said the dying father to his son. Crushed by this final judgment on his failed efforts to emulate his ruthless, billionaire father, the young man left the hospital room, heartbroken. Later in the movie, in a dream within a dream within a dream, the young man is again at his father's deathbed. "Disappointed," the father repeats, and then goes on to finish the sentence: "Disappointed...that you tried to be like me."

"One's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions," said Jesus.

For each one of us, may it be so. Amen.

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